



THE HISTORY OF ‘OHANA NUI

Transformation of the Department of Human Services

Hawai‘i has launched a dramatic new approach to the delivery of human services. Called ‘Ohana Nui, it seeks to break generational patterns of poverty by concurrently addressing all of the basic needs of the entire family. Early results in pilot projects show success. This document provides the backstory on why, what and how DHS is disrupting a decades-long system and re-setting the foundation for human services in Hawai‘i.

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‘Ohana Nui Overview

Hawai‘i has launched a dramatic new approach to the delivery of human services. Called ‘Ohana Nui, it seeks to break generational patterns of poverty by concurrently addressing all of the basic health and human services needs of the entire family, rather than doing so in a piece-meal fashion.

Bringing together Hawai‘i’s Departments of Human Services and Health, along with their community partners, ‘Ohana Nui aims to build a comprehensive, integrated, statewide, one-stop system to provide support for Hawaii’s most vulnerable individuals and families.

Rather than simply providing a social safety net, ‘Ohana Nui aims to be a springboard for the long term success of families, especially those with young children, as it places the whole family on a path to self-sufficiency. In a nutshell, ‘Ohana Nui is an important piece of Hawaii’s anti-poverty strategy.

The transformation that ‘Ohana Nui requires is underway – significant institutional shifts by state departments and organizations beyond the government sector – and there have already been successes that validate the practice. These include the Family Assessment Center in Kaka‘ako for homeless families and a home visiting program, both of which team health and human service professionals and local non-profits to eliminate redundancy and more effectively offer prevention and intervention services in one package.

Overall, ‘Ohana Nui is designed to be at once more efficient as well as more effective at breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. That will save money today and in the long run, as a critical component of ‘Ohana Nui prioritizes the needs of young children, ages 0-5, to prevent adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that can result in the lifetime need for health or human services support.

While there are other experiments with multi-generational and whole family programs across the nation, state officials believe Hawai‘i DHS’ unique statewide reach of health and human services, combined with the state’s deep cultural value of caring for family, or ‘ohana, make Hawai‘i an ideal place to introduce a philosophy such as ‘Ohana Nui.

“‘Ohana Nui is about encouraging the self-sufficiency of the whole family and ending poverty. It is also about making government more efficient, effectively stewarding limited human services resources, and carrying out our Governor’s priority of focusing on the family,” State Human Services Director Pankaj Bhanot said. “It’s a philosophy that is emerging as a national best practice; and it’s perfect for Hawaii’s multi-generational family structure.”

Transform Health and Human Services, Transform Lives

What Is 'Ohana Nui?

Thriving states are comprised of healthy communities. Healthy communities consist of self-sufficient families. For families to be self-sufficient, the basic needs of each member of the family unit must be met.

Data supporting this proposition are driving Hawai'i's latest philosophy for human service delivery called "*Ohana Nui*."

'Ohana Nui is the concurrent provision of necessary supports for basic needs in five areas to all individuals of a family unit.

It places the whole family on a path to self-sufficiency, thus offering the best chance of breaking the cycle of poverty for future generations. It's a springboard for future success across generations rather than a simple safety net for today.

To get there, the 'Ohana Nui strategy requires a dramatic shift from the state's current piecemeal health and human services delivery model to a multi-generational comprehensive model that concurrently delivers supports for basic needs of the whole family in five areas:

- housing/shelter,
- food/nutrition,
- health/wellness,
- education/economic support, and
- social capital.

These basic needs, also known as the social determinants of health, are drivers of and often define an individual's and a family's well-being. When any of these basic needs are compromised, so too is the family's chance of being self-sufficient.

While the focus of 'Ohana Nui is on concurrently addressing the needs of the whole family, a critical component of this strategy is a focus on the children. The circumstances faced by a family's young children, ages 0-5 years old, have a direct correlation to their future well-being and self-sufficiency.

The latest brain research has shown that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as hunger, lack of shelter, abuse and trauma, negatively impact brain development and correlate to negative behaviors in teens and even adults. Adverse childhood experiences can also lead to poor judgment and decision-making, anti-social or risky behavior, chronic disease and even early death. Thus, eliminating young children's exposure to adverse childhood experiences can substantially reduce the need for costly social supports and human service interventions later in

their lives. Simply stated, an investment in children during their early years yields a significant return on investment for the children, their families, and the system.

In a nutshell, first and foremost, 'Ohana Nui is good for the people of Hawai'i. It also promises increasing government efficiency that should eventually bend downward the cost curve of human services.

The History of 'Ohana Nui

The Name

'Ohana Nui, being led by the State Department of Human Services (DHS), is the Hawai'i model of the national Two-Generation (2Gen) approach advocated by Ascend at the Aspen Institute.

2Gen, as its name suggests, defines a family or a household as the children and their parents or the adults in their lives, recognizing that families have many different structures. In Hawai'i, both culture and practical considerations result in a broad definition of family. Hawai'i tops the national list, at 11.6 percent, in the number of multi-generational families living under the same roof. That's twice the national average.⁽¹⁾ This is a result of the high cost of living, high rents, and limited housing, leaving children, parents, grandparents, sometimes great-grandparents, no other option but to live together.

These are the family extensions that make up 'ohana, or family, in our islands.

Hawai'i also has deep traditions of extended family, from Hawaiian culture through the waves of immigrants who settled here. The name of Hawai'i's initiative, 'Ohana Nui, is meant to acknowledge the 'extended family' and was thoughtfully conceived of and voted on by local young adults who were formerly served by DHS in the foster care system. The name can be seen as a reflection of our culture and a way to honor the extended families, including aunts and uncles, coaches, teachers, spiritual advisors, and many others not necessarily related by blood, but who are nevertheless, considered 'ohana.

The Initial Idea - 2Gen

In June 2015, Rachael Wong, DrPH, then director of DHS, learned about the 2Gen concept at an American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) meeting during which Marjorie Sims, managing director of Ascend at the Aspen Institute presented.

"I thought, that's Hawai'i," she said. "We are about family." Wong, a public health professional, understood the implications for population health and knew it would resonate with Pankaj Bhanot, then the department's deputy director, who had applied a whole-family approach to the administration of Temporary Assistance for Families (TANF) and other programs he oversaw while division administrator in the Benefits, Employment, and Support Services Division (BESSD) within DHS.

Wong brought the concept back to Hawai'i, tested it with division leaders within DHS, engaged the Department of Health, and received support from Governor David Ige. 'Ohana Nui/2Gen was the ideal framework under which public health (the social determinants of health), brain science (the ACEs research), and human services could be leveraged as a coordinated strategy and approach. Moreover, it presented, for the first time, the opportunity for the department to "go upstream" and begin to consider the root causes of poverty, a dramatic departure from the way the role of human services had been historically approached.

The following year, DHS used 2Gen research and 'Ohana Nui to frame its budget and policy package during the 2016 Hawai'i State Legislative Session.

That year the legislature approved funding for two new positions within DHS – a policy director and a community development director – each charged, respectively, with understanding the policy implications of 'Ohana Nui and implementing the new concept state-wide.

A Golden Opportunity

With critical supports in place, what became clear was that if there was ever a time to integrate 2Gen in Hawai'i, this was it.

Then, in September 2016, Pankaj Bhanot was appointed DHS director. As the only director to rise from within the ranks of the department, Bhanot was also the most seasoned human services director the department has ever had, bringing 18 years of DHS experience to its top role. Bhanot had led a massive business process transformation in BESSD, the department's largest division.

As Bhanot said, "We had a golden opportunity to transform the department and substantially impact the lives of the people of Hawai'i. With the support of our Governor and Legislature, and the national support from the Aspen Institute, APHSA, and others, there was no better time to take this on."

DHS was the logical lead for 'Ohana Nui. More than 42 percent of all children in the state are served by DHS programs. One in four adults in the state, including many in the homeless population, which is the highest per capita in the United States, are also served by DHS.

Bhanot has since catapulted the program forward, tapping Kimberly Miyazawa Frank for the role of community development director in September 2016 and charging her with putting 'Ohana Nui into operation state-wide.

Intentional Transformation

Under the leadership of Miyazawa Frank, who brings experience in leading transformation as part of her organizational development background, a multi-year transformation plan for a redesign of the state's human services delivery model was developed and is being executed.

It aims to move the department's approximately 2,300 employees as well as its partners to the end goal of transformation, reflecting the 'Ohana Nui philosophy and its principles. The intent is that eventually 'Ohana Nui will permeate everything we do; that it is not another initiative, program or policy, but instead, it is *the way* that DHS and other providers do business.

Leaders of Change

First, the department's leadership or Executive Sponsors were introduced to the concept of 'Ohana Nui and the vision for transforming the department was cast. The goal of breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty for the families we serve was articulated. And, the state-wide context for this anti-poverty strategy was established. Executive Sponsors are asked to "walk the talk" and be able to articulate the vision and their roles in the transformation.

At the middle manager level, an Advisory Group was formed. This group's role is to advise, remove barriers and approve activities that operationalize 'Ohana Nui principles so that the full benefit of the philosophy can be realized in each division, program, and client support provided by DHS.

And, finally, the 'Ohana Nui Engineers play a critical role in implementing the philosophy on a day-to-day basis. As the "boots on the ground," they are charged with working alongside their colleagues to inspire, educate, and ultimately change hearts and minds to embrace the 'Ohana Nui philosophy.

Implementation by the Engineers

'Ohana Nui is being implemented within DHS by a group of highly committed, hand-selected internal champions, self-named the 'Ohana Nui Engineers. Selection into the Engineer group was based primarily on each individual's demonstrated interest in and potential to effectuate positive change in the department through influence, inspiration and education versus direct line authority. The 'Ohana Nui Engineer responsibilities are DHS-wide, in addition to their everyday functional duties.

The Engineer team was constituted with the specific role of serving as "internal champions" for 'Ohana Nui. Their challenge was first and foremost to change attitudes and gain buy-in from their colleagues, and then to overcome real (and perceived) obstacles prohibiting DHS from realizing the full benefit of 'Ohana Nui, effectively "engineering" a new future for DHS.

The Engineers are deploying a proof of concept strategy whereby they identify "low-hanging fruit" or smaller, discreet programs, policies, processes or practices within the department that are "ripe" for immediate application of 'Ohana Nui principles. They garner initial support for the philosophy by demonstrating early wins. Key learnings from these first efforts may also qualify as best practices to replicate within the department and share outside of DHS with other states and jurisdictions interested in applying 'Ohana Nui principles.

Professional Development

As is the case when there is any dramatic change, once the business case for “why” DHS was undertaking the ‘Ohana Nui transformation was established and understood, concern quickly shifted to “WIIFM” or ‘what’s in it for me.’ This is the role of professional development. Without a change in mindset that effective professional development experiences can inspire, fear is the inevitable response.

As the front line change agents of the initiative, the Engineers’ growth and development is a top priority. They meet monthly and receive coaching, tips and tools to discuss the issues they face in their work groups, strategies to clear the hurdles to and share evidence of success in the department’s transformation.

The DHS Engineers were the first cohort to complete the One Shared Future eight-session professional development series that is part of a public-private initiative to accelerate, deepen, and expand good work in the public sector. The series provides experiences that foster trust and self-awareness, improve communication, and nurture collaborations, all of which are skills for leading ‘Ohana Nui transformation.

A second cohort, comprised of DOH and DHS team members, has recently completed the same *Appreciating Change* series; and they have been invited to join the Engineers as change agents for ‘Ohana Nui.

It is envisioned that eventually, all DHS and DOH staff will participate in this formal professional development opportunity. The series is also being rolled-out to leaders in other state departments, priming them for leading overall transformation, which can include the implementation of ‘Ohana Nui.

Pilot Projects

As a transformation of this magnitude cannot be realized overnight, DHS has begun implementing the ‘Ohana Nui philosophy in small, pilot sites. Pilots may be actual sites or venues; and they can also be policies, programs or practices to which ‘Ohana Nui principles are applied. A few of the pilot sites are described below.

Home visits

For Hawai‘i’s Department of Health, the 2Gen approach is not new. Particularly in its efforts in maternal and child health, DOH has been working with children *and* their parents, both in the children with special health needs program and the home visiting program (formerly Healthy Start). Linking DOH and DHS, often through the same social service providers, can mean more robust, comprehensive assistance to that family.

“One of things we’re doing with DHS is home visits to families at risk,” said Dr. Virginia Pressler, former director of the State of Hawaii Department of Health (DOH). “We have many of the same providers that DHS has. We see the same patients from Med-QUEST (a DHS program). We are specifically looking into how we can legally share data between our programs and our departments. The focus is to look at an entire family unit and its dynamics.”

While each department’s focus for the home visit is different – DOH works from a prevention perspective, while DHS works from an intervention perspective – both state agencies worked together to identify a single evidence-based tool that would meet both their respective goals, eliminate redundancy in services and minimize disruption to the families.

Further, the cost savings from streamlining this service can be reinvested to place a greater focus on prevention, which in the long term will eliminate, or at least reduce, the need for intervention.

Early Success at the Homeless Family Assessment Center

While implementation of ‘Ohana Nui continues in pilot sites throughout the department, early success of the philosophy has already been demonstrated. The Family Assessment Center is a ‘one-stop-shop’ for homeless families. It is not a traditional shelter. Rather, the Family Assessment Center applies the Housing-First philosophy, coupled with ‘Ohana Nui principles, to every family it serves. A comprehensive assessment – one that is being used statewide – is administered; and families’ data are entered into a statewide database. The needs in all five areas of ‘Ohana Nui are assessed for all members of the family and supports are put in place, as permanent housing is identified for the family, so families leave the Center with all of the necessary supports for a life of self-sufficiency.

After just 24 months of operation, the outcomes from this comprehensive approach have demonstrated that a whole family/all needs philosophy is superior to an individual/piece-meal approach. By every metric, whether it be residence in permanent housing; sustained employment or education; increased income; health management; or food security; these families are faring better.

The DHS Enterprise System

As is being demonstrated by the pilot sites, ‘Ohana Nui will transform DHS, and in so doing, dramatically improve the way human services are delivered to the people of Hawai‘i. “This intentional disruption of a decades-long approach to human services delivery is the key to giving individuals and families the best chance at creating a cycle of intergenerational opportunity,” said Miyazawa Frank.

The department’s current delivery system requires individuals and families to apply (mostly) manually and in-person for benefits and services one at a time and at different offices in locations spread across the state. Soon, a new department-wide IT system (aka the *Enterprise*

System), will virtually connect and make accessible all of the department’s programs and supports. The Enterprise System will enable application for and eligibility determination of services that provide support in all five basic needs areas in one fell swoop, via a virtual, online, no-wrong-door, one-stop-shop system for individuals and families, significantly improving their access and effectively taking DHS services to the families we serve.

A Partnership With DOH

As DHS is not the sole provider of programs in Hawai‘i that impact the well-being of individuals and families, linkages between government departments, non-profit social service providers, the business sector, and the faith-based community are being made. In essence, any organization that provides supports in any of the five areas of ‘Ohana Nui is being asked to apply the ‘Ohana Nui philosophy.

Virginia Pressler, M.D., former director of DOH, was an early advocate of ‘Ohana Nui, as DOH had already been implementing the concept in some of its programs. “‘Ohana Nui is about treating the whole family. We are recognizing the unit — the living unit — rather than just the individual,” Dr. Pressler said.

Also, as organizations interface with families, a new standard of care emerges to gather information on *all* determinants that predict future outcomes.

“We need to ‘destigmatize’ these questions,” Dr. Pressler said, “in order to identify early on whether there’s depression, substance abuse, or other factors that impact the whole ‘ohana. As normal as checking blood pressure and temperature, we are asking questions, such as, ‘Do they have a house?’ ‘Electricity?’ ‘Are the children in school?’ ‘Is there domestic violence?’ ‘Is there drug abuse?’ ‘What kind of nutrition is the family standard?’”

To be clear, the purpose of ‘Ohana Nui is not to provide a bigger safety net. Nor is it asking social service agencies to change or expand their missions. Rather, the collective approach serves as a springboard, or a “trampoline,” according to Wong, into healthier, more stable life situations. It ensures that families have the basics to be self-sufficient. And, when they have informal networks of support, also known as social capital, they can better weather life’s challenges. This is the formula that breaks the inter-generational cycle of poverty that many have experienced and catapults families into the mainstream.

State-wide Application

Laura Choi of the Federal Reserve Bank in San Francisco recognized ‘Ohana Nui could be a source of the community-building the Bank encourages and incubates. She led the Bank’s sponsorship of DHS convenings with local government and business leaders, funders, non-profits and community members to discuss ‘Ohana Nui, understand human services delivery challenges from the clients’ perspectives, and to co-create solutions. “Think holistically about

families and integrate services that can lead to better outcomes,” said Choi. “We all want to see people in poverty experiencing better outcomes.”

These community meetings have also included individuals and families who are former DHS clients. The upshot of these convenings is new ways of thinking about how we serve families, a refocused perspective of re-design from their vantage point, and partnerships – both expected, and unexpected – that serve to build supports in all five areas for individuals and families.

What It Takes

“To be successful, any transformation requires a comprehensive, planful approach that, in the end, inspires individuals in an organization to commit to a desired outcome by thinking and acting differently. Further, the transformation typically also requires redesign of the policies, processes and systems within that organization to support actions consistent with the desired outcome. That’s how you change culture,” said Kimberly Miyazawa Frank. “At DHS, ‘Ohana Nui illustrates the department’s progression from what has historically been a regulatory and compliance focus in delivery of human services to a more generative approach that calls for co-creation of innovative strategies in partnership with providers and clients to yield the best outcomes for families.”

This progression is illustrated in the Human Services Values Curve, and also reflects the approach taken by our partners at the Department of Health. “Get away from checking-off boxes,” said Dani Wong Tomiyasu, deputy director of the State of HI DOH. “How can we improve services and bring them current, given *all* of the needs in the changing environment that today’s families face?”

By supporting and involving the entire ‘ohana, ‘Ohana Nui bolsters a family’s chances of self-sufficiency. That ultimately means a higher contribution to society and a reduced demand for interventions. Seeing the family as a whole, integrating a comprehensive set of services, building partnerships and teams among providers and the business community all point to the same mark: Healthy, successful futures for individuals and families and disruption of the inter-generational poverty cycle.

National Support

Hawai‘i is plugged into the national network of providers who have adopted 2Gen, with its innovations being tested, modified, shared and replicated among states, counties and programs. In turn, the eyes of the nation’s 2Gen pioneers are on Hawai‘i because the department’s whole-state reach and autonomy allow for clear, quick assessments of what works, with more agility to make turns and adjustments.

The power of sharing best practices and learning from others’ successes strengthens the country’s anti-poverty strategy and continues to build momentum, bringing to life the adage that, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

A Firm Foundation

State-wide changes are being made to ensure the department's transformation is completed with 'Ohana Nui firmly in place as the foundation upon which human and other services are provided. Alignment of legislative budget requests and administrative rules with the 'Ohana Nui philosophy; collaboration with non-profits for a seamless state-wide system; and public-private initiatives in support of establishing family self-sufficiency are evidence of this transformation. Perhaps most significant is a commitment to the redesign of processes and systems that include families voices and reflect their lived experiences.

In the 2018 legislative session, DHS introduced a bill proposing the addition of language to the DHS enabling statute that would require the department to apply a concurrent multi-generational approach to reduce intergenerational poverty (HB 1926). While it received significant support and remained viable until the last day of the session, the bill was not adopted. Strategies for introducing it in the 2019 legislative session are being developed.

Further, introduction of 'Ohana Nui to other state of Hawaii departments and setting as an expectation its application to the processes within the Department of Education and the Department of Labor are also priorities in establishing a firm state-wide foundation.

Longer-term outcomes of this whole family approach will demonstrate improved well-being, greater self-sufficiency, and economic growth for Hawai'i's families. It will also underscore the department's effective stewardship of human services resources and lead to the eventual reduction in the cost of human services supports.

Endnotes

(1) US Census Bureau, 2015, compiled by the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. The U.S. average of multi-generational households is 5.7 percent, with California ranked second at 8.2 percent and Washington, D.C. the third at 7.8 percent. Also, Hawai'i's homeownership rate is among the bottom four nationwide at 57.7 percent, compared with the US average of 65.1 percent.